



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION 2016

SPANISH

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

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1. Introduction

1.1 Syllabus Structure

The current Leaving Certificate Spanish syllabus was introduced in 1995 and first examined in 1997. The syllabus shares a common structure, including common aims and objectives, with those of the other modern European language syllabi such as French, German and Italian.

There are three broad components to the behavioural objectives given in the syllabus: Basic Communicative Proficiency; Language Awareness; Cultural Awareness. The syllabus content is organised in units of *General Activities/Themes*. Within each of these, there are performance targets to illustrate how the objectives are realised in practice, along with details of the linguistic skills, and the structures and grammar that are required in order to achieve those targets.

The syllabus aims to cater for a wide range of pupil ability. Assessment is at two levels: Ordinary and Higher. While the syllabus is the same for both levels, the performance targets involve language use of varying degrees of complexity. Differentiation between the levels is therefore achieved through differing levels of difficulty and complexity of the tasks set on the examination, along with different relative weightings between productive and receptive language skills.

This report should be read in conjunction with the examination papers, the published marking schemes and the syllabus for this subject. The examination papers and marking schemes are available on the State Examination Commission's website www.examinations.ie and the syllabus is available at www.curriculumonline.ie.

1.2 Assessment Specification

The core assessment objectives reflect the four areas of language use that arise from the productive and receptive use of the oral and written language. These are: understanding the spoken language; understanding the written language; communicating in the spoken language; communicating in the written language. They are often summarised for convenience as listening, reading, speaking and writing. The assessment objectives are specified more fully in the syllabus as follows:

All candidates will be assessed on their ability to:

- (a) demonstrate an understanding of the spoken target language in brief and more extended forms in a variety of registers and situations
- (b) demonstrate an understanding of the written target language in brief and more extended forms in a variety of registers
- (c) express themselves with relative fluency and correctness in the target language both in speech and in writing in order to describe, obtain and convey information, offer explanations, and express ideas, opinions and feelings.

The relative weightings assigned to the four areas is also specified in the syllabus. These weightings differ for the two levels, in recognition of the fact that, in the ongoing process of acquiring a language, the receptive skills develop earlier and to a greater degree than do the productive skills. The weightings are as follows:

	Higher Level	Ordinary Level
Speaking	25%	20%
Listening Comprehension	20%	25%
Reading Comprehension	30%	40%
Written Production	25%	15%

Table 1: Mark weightings by level for areas of language use.

The examination at each level comprises three components: an oral examination, which is taken at a common level and tests the candidate's ability to communicate in the spoken language, a listening comprehension test or aural (understand the spoken language), and a written paper containing both a reading comprehension section (understand the written language) and a written production section (communicate in the written language). The marks for these components and sections are allocated according to the above table. At Ordinary Level more marks go for Reading Comprehension (40%) where the candidates are more proficient and less for the Written Production (15%) where many struggle with the technicalities of the target language.

1.3 Participation Trends

Table 2 gives the overall participation rates of candidates in Leaving Certificate Spanish for the last five years. The candidature for Leaving Certificate Spanish Higher Level was 4405 in 2016, an increase of 749 candidates from the previous year. The numbers taking the subject at this level have more than doubled over the past six years (from 2059 candidates in 2010 to 4405 candidates in 2016) and this year - 2016 - the increase exceeds 20%. Since 2004, when 1012 candidates sat the Higher Level paper, the number of candidates taking Higher Level Spanish has increased by 335%.

At Ordinary Level the rate of growth has been gentler by comparison with the Higher Level, increasing from 1800 in 2012 to 2174 in 2016. There was an increase of 37 candidates from 2015 to 2016. The entire cohort taking Leaving Certificate Spanish in 2016 was 6579.

Year	Spanish candidature	Total Leaving Certificate candidature*	Spanish as % of total
2012	4330	52588	12.1
2013	4903	52767	10.7
2014	5340	54025	10.1
2015	5793	55044	9.5
2016	6579	55708	8.4

Table 2: Participation in Leaving Certificate Spanish, 2012 to 2016

*Total Leaving Certificate candidature excludes Leaving Certificate Applied candidates.

The breakdown in terms of participation at Higher and Ordinary Levels over the last five years is given in **Table 3**. The breakdown in terms of gender at Higher Level and at Ordinary Level over the last five years is given in **Table 4** and **Table 5** respectively.

Year	Total Spanish candidature	Number at Ordinary Level	Number at Higher Level	% Ordinary Level	% Higher Level
2012	4330	1800	2530	41.5	58.5
2013	4903	1942	2961	39.6	60.4
2014	5340	1943	3397	36.3	63.7
2015	5793	2138	3655	36.9	63.1
2016	6579	2174	4405	33.0	67.0

Table 3: Number and percentage of candidates at each level, 2012 to 2016

Growth in numbers is much greater at the Higher Level. There has been a gradual and significant migration of candidates from the Ordinary Level examination to the Higher Level in recent years - whereas 58.5% of candidates took the examination at the Higher Level in 2012, that figure had risen to 67% in just four years (2016).

Year	Total Higher level	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female as % of total	Male as % of total
2012	2530	1617	913	63.9	36.1
2013	2961	1901	1060	64.2	35.8
2014	3397	2103	1294	61.9	38.1
2015	3655	2236	1419	61.1	38.9
2016	4405	2638	1767	59.8	40.2

Table 4: Gender composition of Higher Level cohort, 2012 to 2016

Growth in numbers is consistent in both gender groups.

Year	Total Ordinary level	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female as % of total	Male as % of total
2012	1800	1047	753	58.1	41.9
2013	1942	1034	908	53.2	46.8
2014	1943	1021	922	52.5	47.5
2015	2138	1120	1018	52.3	47.7
2016	2174	1113	1061	51.1	48.9

Table 5: Gender composition of Ordinary level cohort, 2012 to 2016

The percentage of male candidates taking Spanish at Ordinary Level is increasing.

2. Performance of Candidates

2.1 Higher Level Statistics

The distribution of grades awarded over the last five years is given in **Table 6** (lettered grades) and **Table 7** (sub-grades).

Year	A	B	C	A, B, C	D	E	F	NG	E, F, NG
2012	15.3	33.4	34	82.7	16.1	1.1	0.2	0.0	1.3
2013	16.5	29.0	33.9	79.4	18.7	1.8	0.1	0.0	1.9
2014	16.4	32.7	30.4	79.5	18.3	2	0.2	0.0	2.2
2015	16.5	33.1	33.5	83.1	15.6	1.2	0.1	0.0	1.3
2016	17.1	28.7	29.8	75.6	21.6	2.7	0.1	0.0	2.8

Table 6: Percentage of candidates awarded each lettered grade in Higher Level Spanish, 2012 – 2016

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	6.6	8.7	9.3	10.9	13.2	11.9	11.9	10.2	7.6	5.5	3.0	1.1	0.2	0.0
2013	8.5	8.0	8.3	9.7	11.0	11.6	12.2	10.1	9.1	6.3	3.3	1.8	0.1	0.0
2014	7.5	8.9	10.4	11.2	11.1	10.7	10.0	9.7	8.2	5.9	4.2	2	0.2	0.0
2015	8.5	8.0	9.4	10.9	12.8	12.3	11.2	10.0	7.7	4.7	3.2	1.2	0.1	0.0
2016	9.0	8.1	9.6	9.3	9.8	10.2	11.1	8.5	9.3	7.3	5.0	2.7	0.1	0.0

Table 7: Percentage of candidates awarded each sub-grade in Higher Level Spanish, 2012 – 2016

The percentage of A's was slightly higher this year as was the percentage not achieving a D grade. The grades B and C were lower than average, resulting in an increase in the D grade. It is noted that the entire increase in numbers of candidates taking the Leaving Certificate examination opted to take the Higher Level paper. It was evident that there were quite a number of candidates, approximately 380 candidates, who attempted the Higher level paper but who would have been better served taking the Ordinary Level paper. This is evidenced by the fact that many of these candidates did not attempt the written production 'Link' question in Section B. Some candidates did not fully understand the topics and, consequently, were unable to gain higher marks. This could account for the slightly higher than usual E+F+NG grades, combined with the fact that the two short comprehension passages proved to be more challenging than usual for these candidates.

The distribution of sub-grades by gender over the last five years is given in **Table 8** (female candidates) and **Table 9** (male candidates).

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	6.5	9.3	9.1	11.3	13.6	12.5	11.4	10.3	7.6	4.5	2.5	1.2	0.1	0.0
2013	8.8	8.2	8.3	9.9	11.4	11.6	12.1	9.6	9.3	6.4	2.9	1.6	0.0	0.0
2014	7.9	9.7	11.8	12.0	10.6	11.2	10.1	8.7	7.3	5.0	3.9	1.6	0.2	0.0
2015	8.8	8.8	9.5	11.0	12.8	12.7	11.2	9.9	7.4	4.2	2.5	1.0	0.1	0.0
2016	10.4	8.3	9.6	10.0	10.2	10.6	10.9	8.2	8.0	6.3	4.8	2.6	0.1	0.0

Table 8: Percentage of female candidates awarded each sub-grade in Higher Level Spanish, 2012 – 2016

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	6.0	7.8	9.4	10.5	12.0	11.0	12.8	10.0	8.0	7.2	3.6	1.3	0.3	0.0
2013	8.0	7.6	8.4	9.3	10.5	11.4	12.4	11.0	8.7	6.0	4.1	2.3	0.3	0.0
2014	6.5	7.7	7.9	10.0	12.3	9.7	10.0	11.2	9.9	7.1	4.8	2.7	0.3	0.0
2015	8.8	6.7	9.3	10.6	12.7	11.6	11.2	10.1	8.1	5.4	4.4	1.6	0.1	0.0
2016	7.4	7.6	9.7	8.0	9.1	9.5	11.4	9.1	11.2	8.8	5.3	2.7	0.1	0.0

Table 9: Percentage of male candidates awarded each sub-grade in Higher Level Spanish, 2012 – 2016

Female candidates have continued to achieve higher grades over the five year period, while the E+F+NG rate is slightly higher amongst male candidates.

2.2 Ordinary Level Statistics

A total of 2174 candidates sat the examination at Ordinary level and 74.5% achieved a C grade or higher. A total of 19.6% scored a D grade and 5.9% did not achieve a D grade. The combined E+F+NG grade was much better than last year, down from 6.9% to 5.9%, which is very positive.

The overall performance of candidates was good and the majority of candidates attempted all sections of the examination with few candidates leaving blank spaces.

The distribution of grades awarded at Ordinary level over the last five years is given in **Table 10** (lettered grades) and **Table 11** (sub-grades).

Year	A	B	C	A, B, C	D	E	F	NG	E, F, NG
2012	3.1	29.8	36.3	69.2	23.6	5.8	1.3	0.1	7.2
2013	3.3	29.6	40.1	73	20.7	4.5	1.4	0.2	6.1
2014	4.7	31.7	35.5	71.9	22.1	4.3	1.4	0.2	5.9
2015	2.8	28.4	37.9	69.1	23.7	5.6	1.6	0.0	7.2
2016	3.2	28.9	38.2	70.3	23.3	5.1	1.3	0.0	6.4

Table 10: Percentage of candidates awarded each lettered grade in Ordinary Level Spanish, 2012 – 2016

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	0.5	2.6	6.3	9.7	13.8	11.7	13.9	10.7	9.7	7.1	6.8	5.8	1.3	0.1
2013	0.9	2.4	6.3	10.2	13.1	16.3	13.6	10.2	9.7	6.1	4.9	4.5	1.4	0.2
2014	0.9	3.8	7.1	11.4	13.2	12.8	11.7	11.0	8.0	6.8	7.3	4.3	1.4	0.2
2015	0.8	2.0	6.1	9.4	12.9	14.1	13.1	10.7	9.4	6.3	8.0	5.6	1.6	0.0
2016	0.7	2.5	5.5	10.2	13.2	15.9	12.0	10.3	9.1	7.4	6.8	5.1	1.3	0.0

Table 11: Percentage of candidates awarded each sub-grade in Ordinary Level Spanish, 2012 – 2016

A high degree of consistency in individual grades is evident over the five year period and also in the A, B, C and in the E, F and NG groupings.

The distribution of sub-grades by gender over the last five years is given in **Table 12** (female candidates) and **Table 13** (male candidates).

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	0.4	2.9	7.6	9.8	15.3	11.0	14.4	11.1	8.5	6.3	7.1	4.7	0.9	0.0
2013	1.0	3.5	6.7	11.3	13.6	15.7	13.8	9.2	9.4	5.9	4.2	4.8	0.8	0.2
2014	0.7	4.5	7.8	12.6	13.7	14.0	11.2	10.3	8.1	6.2	6.3	3.6	1.0	0.0
2015	0.7	2.1	6.1	8.9	13.6	15.3	12.9	11.6	8.5	6.6	7.4	5.3	1.1	0.1
2016	0.7	2.7	6.6	10.8	15.9	15.9	11.2	10.2	8.8	7.1	5.4	3.8	0.7	0.1

Table 12: Percentage of female candidates awarded each sub-grade in Ordinary Level Spanish, 2012 – 2016

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2012	0.7	2.1	4.5	9.6	11.8	12.7	13.0	10.4	11.3	8.1	6.4	7.3	2.0	0.1
2013	0.8	1.1	5.9	9.0	12.4	17.1	13.3	11.5	10.0	6.4	5.8	4.2	2.2	0.2
2014	1.1	3.0	6.3	10.0	12.6	11.6	12.4	11.6	8.0	7.6	8.4	5.1	2.0	0.4
2015	0.9	2.0	6.1	10.0	12.1	12.8	13.5	9.7	10.3	5.9	8.6	6.0	2.2	0.0
2016	0.7	2.4	4.3	9.5	10.4	15.9	12.8	10.5	9.3	7.6	8.2	6.4	2.0	0.0

Table 13: Percentage of male candidates awarded each sub-grade in Ordinary Level Spanish, 2012 – 2016

3. Analysis of Candidate Performance

3.1 Engagement and Performance

Statistical information on engagement with and performance on the various questions in the written and aural components is presented below. Data on performance in the various aspects of the oral component are not captured centrally in a manner that allows for similar analysis.

Higher Level

Table 14 is a summary based on an analysis of a random selection of 380 scripts (approximately 8.5% of all scripts).

Section	Question	Popularity (% attempts)	Rank order in popularity	Average mark (and as %)	Rank order in average mark	Topic
Aural		100		45 (56%)	7	Listening comprehension
A	1a	4%	2	30 (60%)	6	Prescribed literature: <i>Sin Noticias de Gurb</i>
	1b	98%	1	33.25 (66.5%)	3	Journalistic text: <i>Familias buscan recursos..</i>
	2	100		10 (50%)	10	Short reading comprehension passages
B	1-4	100		31.7 (63.4%)	5	Reading comprehension: <i>Un Presidente Extraordinario</i>
	5	100		26.15 (52.3%)	9	'Link' question
C	1a	92.6%	1	19.6 (65.3%)	4	Dialogue
	1b	14.5%	2	16.8 (56%)	7	Letter
	2a	72.2%	1	15 (75%)	1	Diary
	2b	27.9%	2	13.5 (67.5%)	2	Note

Table 14: Popularity of and average mark for each question, Higher Level Spanish.

Some candidates attempted both the Dialogue (1a) and the Letter (1b) options and they tended to score similar marks in both. Where candidates attempted both the Diary Entry (2a) and the Note (2b) they invariably scored lower in the Note question. Overall, the small number of candidate who attempted the letter tended to score well.

This year about 140 candidates, about 3% of the candidates, attempted the literary text question *Sin Noticias de Gurb*. There was also a small number of candidates who had obviously not read the novel, as they could not answer question 5 which assesses knowledge and understanding of aspects of the novel as a whole. Examiners noted that, in schools where the novel had been taught, those candidates did well overall, particularly candidates who had a flair for literary criticism.

Ordinary Level

Table 15 is a summary based on an analysis of a random selection of 140 scripts (approximately 6.4% of all scripts).

Section	Question	Popularity (% attempts)	Average mark (and as %)	Rank order in average mark	Topic
A	1	100	67.78%	3	<i>Pesadilla en el paraíso</i>
	2	100	50.8%	8	<i>Las vacas marinas del océano</i>
	3	100	72.35%	1	<i>El Café – ¿un hábito sano?</i>
	4	100	57.96%	7	<i>Aficionada a los toros</i>
	5	100	67.9%	2	<i>Una expresión de libertad</i>
B	1	100	58.53%	6	Letter/e-mail
	2	100	60.95%	5	Note/diary entry
Aural		100	61.69%	4	Listening Comprehension

Table 15: Popularity of and average mark for each question, Ordinary Level Spanish, 2016

3.2 Attainment of Key Syllabus Objectives

Communicating in the spoken language (oral examination)

The oral examination has three possible parts, namely a Literary Option, the General Conversation and the Role Plays. The Literary Option has not been selected by any candidate over the past ten years. The General Conversation is worth 70 of the 100 marks available and must precede the Role Play, which is worth 30 marks.

Overall Standards

Overall the vast majority of candidates performed well in the oral examination. Some candidates demonstrated excellent fluency. This year, just over 7% of candidates scored full marks in the oral examination and approximately 24% scored between 90% and 100%. This shows that the standard of teaching and learning of oral skills in Spanish nationwide is good and is to be commended. In general, candidates can discuss a range of topics pertaining to everyday life. The fact that the numbers taking Spanish at second level have been growing consistently over the past decade and more shows that it is a language that students enjoy learning. When Spanish is spoken in the classroom regularly for daily interactions, the candidates who present for the oral examination show a level of confidence and fluency in the language which is encouraging. This daily use of the target language is to be commended and reflects a facility with the language and a commitment by teachers to emphasise oral communication. Nationally, the level of preparedness is good with very competent candidates presenting for examination throughout the country. However, some examiners reported that a number of candidates were taught in a 'rote learning' manner which prevented the natural flow of conversation. Many candidates had prepared a range of topics in the general conversation but, when gently disengaged from rote learned topics, found it difficult to communicate effectively in the target language.

The vast majority of candidates fall into the B, C and D categories, with a small percentage in general failing to obtain a D grade. Generally, candidates do well in the oral component, where the emphasis is on giving marks for general proficiency rather than deducting marks for errors. As always it is very encouraging to see a large number of candidates who have not spent a considerable amount of time in Spain score 65 or even 70 marks in the General Conversation. It is obvious that, if candidates prepare well in advance of the examination, they will perform well in the oral component. In general, candidates were well prepared for

the role-plays and this success in the role-play component can be very helpful to some candidates in enabling them to achieve a D grade overall. A small minority of candidates had not prepared any of the role-plays and thus lost most of the 30 marks available.

Most Common Linguistic Lapses

- Many candidates still confuse the verbs *ser* and *estar*.
- Some examiners noted that candidates used *facilidades* for *instalaciones* when talking about facilities in school etc.
- Only the best candidates used the subjunctive in the correct manner. However, some candidates had learned off phrases with the subjunctive included in the sentence.
- Most candidates still rely on the Preterite tense when speaking about events in the past, they seem to dislike, or are unfamiliar with, the Imperfect tense and the Present Perfect tense.
- Agreement of adjectives was problematic for some candidates.
- Some candidates used the infinitive of the verb when answering a question, regardless of the tense required.
- Many of these candidates just repeated the form of the verb used by the examiner.
- Some candidates used *me prefiero*, and similarly *me odio* and *me quiero*.
- The correct use of the verb *gustar* continues to pose a significant challenge for weaker candidates.
- Some candidates used the verb *ser* instead of *tener* for age.
- There is evidence of pronunciation difficulties, for example, with the word *mayor* and school subjects such as *biología*, *geografía*, *química* and *historia*.
- Some candidates repeated the question structure or the second person form of the verb in their answer.
- Some candidates were unable to give descriptions of people.
- Some candidates did not understand the Perfect Tense question *¿Has estado en España?*

Particularly Good Features

- The vast majority of candidates could converse in the language in a competent manner.
- Many candidates used a wide range of vocabulary and tenses when speaking. The exposure of candidates to real-life situations in the language is very beneficial and helps build confidence and fluency.
- The number of candidates who go on holidays with family to Spain or on exchange visits is contributing to the high level of fluency in the oral examination.
- Spanish teachers in general are doing a good job in teaching not only the language but also the culture, instilling a love of all things Spanish in their students.

Understanding the Spoken Language (Listening Comprehension)

HIGHER LEVEL

The Aural Comprehension proved challenging for many candidates and very few candidates scored full marks. However, candidates performed quite well overall. Some examiners reported that the standard of answering in this section has improved in recent years. While the question on Weather (Question 6) was regarded as quite easy, most examiners agreed that Questions 3 and 7 were the most challenging for candidates. A number of candidates lost marks by leaving blanks or by writing incomplete answers.

1. *Anuncio* *El Libro Express*

This was answered reasonably well by candidates.

- (a) Most candidates scored 2 out of 3 marks, omitting some details. Many candidates wrote ‘provide books on public transport’.
- (b) Very few candidates understood the concept of a vending machine. They did not understand *llevarse*.
- (c) Most candidates scored full marks here, as there were many options. Some did not understand the word *infantil* as children.
- (d) Quite well answered. However, many candidates just guessed ‘search the internet and ring this number’.

2. *Diálogo Entrevista con Carolina Morín, campeona mundial de Bádminton*
 This question was generally not well answered. Some candidates had difficulty with *me dieron la libertad* in (a) and in (b) *felicitaciones* was often misinterpreted.
- (a) Only the higher performing candidates scored full marks.
 - (b) Many candidates answered incorrectly here – they wrote about what Carolina herself wanted to do as opposed to what other people wanted.
 - (c) Quite well answered as there was a good selection of correct answers. Most popular choices were ‘ambitious’ ‘mature’ and ‘good physical strength’.
 - (d) Most scored full marks here. Occasionally candidates lost marks by only writing ‘going to the Olympics’.
3. *Diálogo Angel Aghilli habla de la promoción de coches eléctricos*
 Candidates needed to listen carefully to grasp that *un carril bici era algo inconcebible* or that the bike *era algo del pasado*.
- (a) Most understood ‘governments’ but had difficulty with *fabricantes*.
 - (b) Candidates usually lost marks here by omitting details. The past tense *llegué* and *era* were missed by many candidates.
 - (c) This was well answered as most understood *andar, ir en bicicleta* and *el coche eléctrico*, thus scoring full marks. However, very few understood *todoterreno*.
4. *Descriptivo El rincón del vago*
 Marks were lost here for omission of detail.
- (a) Not many candidates scored full marks here, as the idea of sharing or exchanging notes was missed. Most mentioned ‘website’ but failed to expand on this.
 - (b) Most candidates failed to score full marks. Most simply answered ‘it is easy’, without giving the idea of accessing the work without effort.
 - (c) Some candidates did not recognise the number ‘1.5 million’.
 - (d) Many candidates scored full marks here but other candidates did not understand ‘blog’.

5. *Descriptivo Los mercados callejeros*

Most candidates scored well in this question and many got full marks.

- (a) Most candidates scored at least 3 or 4 marks.
- (b) 'History' and 'learn about the people' were the usual answers given. Some candidates included information from (a) 'you can walk around etc....'
- (c) Most scored at least 3 marks, very few candidates gave the answer 'coins'. Many candidates also gave the answer 'wallets'.
- (d) Many candidates scored full marks.

6. *El tiempo* The weather section - which is always examined - was very accessible this year, allowing most candidates to score well and many to attain full marks.

- (a) Most candidates scored at least 1 or 2 marks.
- (b) Most candidates understood the idea of 'from the North' but did not understand 'losing intensity' or the idea of 'the wind continuing to blow'.
- (c) Many candidates scored full marks.
- (d) Many candidates scored full marks.

7. *Una Noticia Un 'Minion' en Dublín*

This was the most challenging question on the aural, though very topical.

- (a) Most candidates did not supply information about the 'fair'.
- (b) Most candidates scored quite well here when they gave the idea that 'they could not believe'.
- (c) Most candidates understood either that it was strange or that the police were called.
- (d) Many candidates did not understand the words *no resultó herido*.

ORDINARY LEVEL

In general the aural section of the examination was well answered and many candidates achieved a good grade in this section of the examination. A good knowledge of vocabulary relating to transport, countries, clothes and weather was evident. Very few sections or questions were not attempted. There was plenty of choice for many of the answers this year but very few candidates gave more answers than they were asked for. Sometimes when candidates are asked for two answers and there is a choice of four or five, giving a third

answer may get them marks if one of the first two is incorrect. The multiple-choice answers provide an excellent opportunity for some weaker candidates to pick up marks. In some answers, candidates lost marks because they failed to give sufficient detail. Overall, most candidates achieved a D or higher in this section. However, some candidates did not attempt this part of the examination which is to be regretted, as in many instances these candidates failed to obtain an overall D grade in the written paper as a consequence.

1. *Anuncio* *El Libro Express*

This question was very well answered and very few candidates were unable to identify the phone number.

- (a) Candidates showed good recognition of ‘book service’ but very few candidates were able to recognise ‘machine’.
- (b) Some found *literatura clásica* problematic.

2. *Diálogo* *Entrevista con Carolina Morín, campeona mundial de Bádminton*

- (a) The majority of candidates recognised *el baile flamenco*.
- (b) Parts (b) and (c) in this question proved quite difficult for some candidates even though there was a wide range of answers.
- (c) Many candidates did not grasp the idea of ‘training’ or ‘preparing for the Olympics’ in question (c).

3. *Diálogo* *Angel Aghilli habla de la promoción de coches eléctricos*

- (a) In this question many candidates did not understand *principios del siglo XX* while recognising *veinte*.
- (b) Many candidates showed a good knowledge of countries. Some candidates answered question (b) in Spanish rather than in English, thus losing marks for comprehension.
- (c) Means of transport were generally very well known.

4. *Descriptivo* *El rincón del vago*

This was well answered overall and candidates showed good recognition of numbers.

- (a) & (b) Candidates were unfamiliar with Salamanca and the Latin American countries, which may indicate to a lack of cultural awareness.

- (d) Most candidates recognised that this question was based on a blog giving advice.

5. *Descriptivo Los mercados callejeros*

This was answered well overall.

- (a) Very few candidates got the comparison *los precios son más bajos que en las tiendas tradicionales* but recognised *bajos*.
- (b) Both (b) and (c) were generally well answered.

6. *El tiempo* The question on the weather was well answered this year.

- (a) & (b) Some candidates lost marks by answering ‘sunny’ for question (b) as well as question (a), indicating that they had not read the question carefully.

7. *Una Noticia Un ‘Minion’ en Dublín*

This question proved challenging for most candidates.

- (a) Very few candidates understood the word *feria*.
- (b) Most candidates understood *policía* but few candidates got the answer ‘drivers’, opting instead for ‘conductors’.

Understanding the Written Language (Reading Comprehension)

HIGHER LEVEL

Prescribed Literature: Sin Noticias de Gurb by Eduardo Mendoza

This is an optional section, with only 144 students answering the question on the literary text *Sin noticias de Gurb*. This was approximately 3% of the total cohort, about 0.5% less than in 2015.

The comprehension questions were not difficult and Question 5, about the alien’s opinion of humans, was very approachable. Those who answered this section scored highly and also scored good marks overall. In many cases, the question was attempted by candidates who obviously had not read the novel. Four points were required, and those who lost marks did so through lack of examples.

Journalistic Text

Familias buscan recursos para sus hijos

The journalistic text was answered by almost all candidates and candidates obtained an average of 66%.

This was an interesting and topical passage and it was easy for candidates to understand the general theme. Most answered reasonably well and this was the section of the paper in which candidates achieved the highest average score.

Question 1

This summary question was answered reasonably well, although there were several instances where candidates missed the nuance. The answers were relatively accessible.

Question 2.

Part (a) was answered well, as a straight-forward construction is often accessible in this Part. Most candidates scored well in this part of the question. However, parts (b) and (c) both required prepositions and the skill to identify these was one that frequently eluded candidates. It points to the need to teach the technique of slotting the phrase in the question into the space provided for the answer in the text. Only if it sounds right when substituted does one know that all the necessary words have been included. Such a skill only comes with practice and it is a skill that is well worth cultivating. In part (c) many candidates left out the word 'a' in *debido a*.

Question 3

Part (a) required an attention to detail that only the best candidates achieved. In general *la que* was not understood. Relative pronouns were often overlooked and need to be given more attention.

Part (b) was understood by the majority of candidates.

The incorrect translation of *su* in part (c) points to the need to encourage candidates to look at the overall meaning of the phrase and to avoid translating word by word. The instruction in the question is to explain the phrases 'in their context'.

Question 4.

This question was attempted by most candidates. The better candidates identified the synonym for *fuleron obligados* as *tuvieron que*.

The second option was more difficult and most candidates had difficulty finding a synonym for *no hay*. For *suficientes*, *bastante* should have been a straightforward choice but was not provided by many. *Recursos* was not well understood by most candidates - the exact meaning of words such as *facilidades* and *instalaciones* should be taught in class.

Short Comprehension Passages

The two short comprehension passages proved significantly more challenging than in previous years and consequently candidates struggled to get the marks they would have expected to achieve. This was clearly evident as the average mark was approximately 50%.

Herido grave por hacerse un ‘selfie’

The phrase *al sufrir una caída* was poorly understood by many candidates. Words like *acantilado*, *camilla flotante* and *ancha* proved difficult and the grammar involved in *no pudieron subirlo por tierra* was beyond the capabilities of many candidates.

¿Por qué no fijamos la fecha de la Semana Santa?

Despite the fact that *Semana Santa* is part of the Junior Certificate syllabus vocabulary, many candidates did not understand this phrase. Other words which caused difficulties for some candidates included *peso* and *hosteleros*. Similarly, the meaning of *caer* in the phrase *los años que la Semana Santa cae demasiado pronto* proved difficult for many candidates.

Section B Comprehension

Un presidente extraordinario

This section was well answered in general. Most candidates scored 30 marks out of a possible 50 marks.

Question 1.

This was well answered in general. However, some candidates lost marks due to lack of accuracy or by omitting or adding extra words.

Question 2.

This question proved challenging for some candidates. Candidates mainly lost marks when they attempted to translate word for word and hence lost the meaning completely. The words which were the most problematic were *juventud*, *valores*, *exige*, *apenas* and *detenido*.

Examiners reported that candidates concentrated too much on the words they did not know, and not on the words they knew, which would help them get the overall meaning. Many candidates did not refer back to the original context within the passage to assist them in gathering meaning and instead just read each sentence in isolation.

Question 3.

This was answered very well in the main with many candidates scoring high marks. Most gained 4 or 5 marks. However, many lost marks by either including an article when it was not required or by excluding it when it was required.

Question 4.

This question was well answered by most candidates with many getting full marks in (a), (b) and (c). Candidates had many options to choose from in their answers. Candidates scored an average of 11 out of 15 marks available.

ORDINARY LEVEL

On the whole, this section was very well attempted by the majority of candidates, with very few candidates leaving sections blank.

1. *Pesadilla en el Paraíso*

Despite a few challenging questions here, many candidates scored well. Many candidates lost marks for including irrelevant information or for leaving out essential material. More manipulation of the text was required this year in comparison to previous years.

Question (c) gave two paragraphs as a choice and this proved confusing for some candidates. In a number of questions, the ability to change the verb to suit the subject of the question was poorly demonstrated, for example in question (e).

Questions (h) and (i) were generally answered well.

2. ***Las Vacas marinas del océano***

This comprehension was well answered by the majority of candidates. The number *quinientos* was not known by many candidates - despite the fact that it frequently appears at this level.

3. ***El Café - ¿un hábito sano?***

This comprehension was well answered with many candidates doing well. Question (d) proved to be the most challenging question, with many candidates not understanding either *taza* or *juntos*.

4. ***Aficionado a los toros***

This was a well answered comprehension. In question (b) the numbers *dos* and *doce* were frequently confused.

In question (c) *correo electrónico* was not understood by all. Question (e) proved demanding for some candidates.

5. ***Una expresión de libertad***

This was an engaging and interesting comprehension with a wide range of vocabulary for candidates at this level. It was well answered by most candidates.

Question (d) was only understood by the more able candidates.

Question (e) was also challenging, but question (f) offered a wide choice of answers, with many candidates achieving full marks in this question.

Communicate in the Written Language (Written Production)

HIGHER LEVEL

This part of the examination proved to be the most challenging. The different exercises, ranging from the Opinion Piece, the Dialogue Construction, the Letter Writing, the Note and the Diary Entry, test the knowledge of language of the candidates. This is particularly evident in the area of basic verbal tenses and basic vocabulary.

The written production section of the examination should have been accessible to candidates who had been prepared for Higher Level. However, some candidates who attempted the Higher level would have been better advised to take the Ordinary Level. This year, the usual correlation between the comprehension sections and the written sections was not evident, with many candidates scoring well on the comprehension sections but producing poor written work - or none at all.

The Link Question (Section B Question 5)

In Section B Question 5, the 'Link' question, was the most challenging part of the paper for most candidates, particularly for candidates who did not understand the titles. Most candidates know that the percentage of marks going for the oral part of the examination is 25% but many are not aware that the 'Link' question carries 50 marks or 12.5% percent of the total marks for the Higher Level examination. From the work produced by the candidates, it is obvious that most candidates had not spent as much time and effort on their written work as they had in preparation for the oral examination. More balance in preparation for the examination is advised, so that candidates can achieve reasonably high marks on the Link question and thus do well overall.

As some examiners have attested, a larger number of candidates than usual did not attempt this question, most likely because they did not fully understand the titles, thereby jeopardising their ability to achieve a pass at this level. The word *sencilla* in *La vida puede ser sencilla* was misunderstood by some candidates and in the second possibility, *los demás*, in *Hay que hacer más para los demás*, was similarly misinterpreted. As stated, the Ordinary Level paper would probably have been a better option for many of these candidates as there is no requirement to attempt an essay question at Ordinary level.

Candidates are encouraged to give their **own opinions** and to avoid producing learned-off and irrelevant material. While some candidates wrote very good essays with good examples, examiners noted that many answers were not relevant and contained tracts of learned-off material which did not relate to the topic in hand. Candidates who scored well wrote accurately in clear, simple Spanish, in many cases drawing on their own personal experiences. These candidates wrote meaningful, often original, essays giving their own opinions and personal examples from their own lives which were relevant to the title given. Some candidates wrote essays on the wrong topics or used learned-off essays on other topics. In some instances, marks for relevance were lost as candidates strayed off the point. In other

instances, candidates included so many learned-off phrases in their essay that the essay made very little sense and lacked coherence and meaning. Some candidates lost marks for content as they repeated the same point rather than offering a number of different well-developed points. Some candidates lost marks for language content. At times the standard of language was very high, with a good level of vocabulary, correct verb usage and good use of idiomatic Spanish. However, many essays had a high level of simple spelling mistakes, a lack of agreement of adjectives, incorrect use of singular and plural and other grammatical errors such as verb tenses. Candidates should also be made aware that extracts copied from the given passage gain no marks.

Candidates were not penalised for exceeding the word count in this section of the paper but candidates who wrote little could not achieve high marks. It is important that candidates present clear, cogent points related to the topic and to realise also that they are free to agree or disagree with it, or indeed to make a combination of points both in favour and against the theme. Candidates need to make clear points and develop each of these fully to achieve high marks.

1a Dialogue Construction

Those candidates who performed to a high standard here were obviously well prepared and demonstrated good vocabulary, sentence structure and word order. However, even weaker candidates managed to achieve quite good marks as most were able to get the general point across, albeit with errors. The expressions were basic enough, enabling candidates to gain marks for expressions that would be quite familiar to them, particularly through the preparation for the oral examination. This relationship between the Dialogue Construction and the oral examination has been apparent for a number of years now. It is beneficial as it reinforces coherency between teaching practice and the syllabus and positively supports the communicative methodology in the classroom. Despite the fact that there are always some challenging points here, the majority of candidates again chose the Dialogue Construction and this year many candidates achieved 6/6 for several of the turns. Candidates were required to use several verbs in the subjunctive mood but many candidates were unable to manipulate the subjunctive mood.

Grammatically, the Dialogue Construction highlighted the need for better teaching and learning of the words such as *vez* and its gender, *llevar* + time period + gerund, *espero que* + subjunctive, the Present Perfect Tense expression *llevarse bien con alguien*, *conocer a*

alguien, tener ganas de + infinitive and mejorar. The agreement of nouns and adjectives and the use of basic tenses were problematic for some candidates.

If candidates lack basic structures, this shows up particularly in this section, where the spelling of the most basic verbs and the agreement of nouns and adjectives can be poor.

1b Letter/email

Only a small minority of candidates attempted this question. Some wrote very good letters although many failed to develop the points sufficiently. In some centres all candidates chose the Letter option, made a good effort and scored well. Some did very well, as the topic of the part-time jobs would certainly have been prepared in class. The letters were of a high standard in the main. Some candidates tended to write very little on each point and so did not get full marks. For full marks candidates are expected to make five relevant points. Each point should be expanded and developed. Candidates should be made aware that they do not have to stick rigidly to the points given. They can make five different points as long as they are relevant. Those who do expand five points well tend to score high marks.

2a and 2b - Diary Entry and Note

Most candidates elected to do the Diary Entry as opposed to the Note.

Many candidates performed well in these sections and it is interesting to note that those who attempted to convey meaning (particularly in the Diary Entry) rather than translate directly were usually more accurate and gained high marks. However, the manipulation of common verbs in basic tenses was poor in general. In the Diary Entry some candidates had problems with adjectival endings, noun agreement and when and how to use *ser* and *estar*.

In the Note, some candidates accurately conveyed the general meaning and then continued to include unnecessary material, made mistakes and thereby lost marks. It is important that candidates are aware that the task in both the Diary Entry and Note is to cover **only** the points given and candidates are not required to expand further here. If a candidate gives the four points in either the Diary Entry or the Note, in clear accurate Spanish, they can achieve five marks per point. However, candidates cannot achieve the five marks if they make errors and are inaccurate in language use.

Common Errors in Diary Entry and Note:

- Difficulty in expressing an emotion ('how you feel about the course').
- Difficulty expressing a future idea – no future tense used when required.
- Incorrect verb usage.
- Difficulty expressing a past idea.
- Lack of basic vocabulary: 'the course, to repair, to call, dance, teacher, I hope, excursion, today' and even the word 'class'.
- Simple spelling mistakes.
- Not completing the task required or not covering one or more of the points.
Difficulty in describing something funny that happened in class.

ORDINARY LEVEL

A small minority of less able candidates did not attempt the written expression section and this is to be regretted, as even small efforts in this section may help candidates attain a D grade.

Section B. Q.1. Letter / email

Most candidates attempted this question and there were only a small number of blank responses.

Point 1 – very few candidates were able to express this correctly using a past tense verb.

Point 2 – well answered, although many candidates wrote it in the present tense.

Almost all candidates scored well on points 3, 4 and 5 but very few got full marks for all points.

Section B. Q. 2. Note / Diary Entry

Although candidates have a choice between the Note and the Diary Entry in this question, a large number of candidates attempted both questions with the higher of the two marks being awarded. This year, approximately 50% of candidates attempted the Note and did not attempt the Diary Entry. Last year more candidates attempted both.

Note

This was a well-constructed note and candidates scored well here. Because a lot of information was required in point 3, many candidates lost marks here. A significant number of candidates had difficulty expressing ‘the time they would be home at’ in point 4.

Diary Entry

Candidates who attempted both the Note and the Diary Entry generally achieved higher marks in the Note. The vocabulary required for the Diary Entry may have seemed prescriptive to the candidates. For many candidates, the message was only partially understood.

4. Conclusions

HIGHER LEVEL

Overall a very good standard of oral communication skills was demonstrated by many of this year’s Leaving Certificate candidates of Spanish. Although some candidates are still being taught in a ‘rote learning’ manner which prevents the natural flow of conversation, a large number of candidates show a level of confidence and fluency in the language which is very encouraging. This is a consequence of the emphasis placed on oral communication by the teachers and of the efforts of the candidates themselves.

In the written section of the paper, the standard of some of the candidates was very high with some candidates performing very well in all aspects of the examination. However, even with some good candidates, a lack of the basics in Spanish prevented them achieving a high grade, e.g. numbers’ days’ dates, weather, basic tenses, correct gender etc. Examiners suggest that a thorough revision of Junior Certificate vocabulary and grammar would be very useful in preparation for the Leaving Certificate examination, as a knowledge of basic Spanish is essential in order to participate successfully at this level. Much of the preparation for the oral examination overlaps with preparation for the aural component as well as for the Dialogue Construction, the Diary Entry and the Note – and because of the overlapping vocabulary and themes, learning in one area reinforces learning in the other areas.

It is clear that candidates are practising their oral and listening skills and performing well overall in the oral and aural sections of the examination. It is suggested, however, that more

time and attention be spent on improving candidates' written production skills - as it was evident that the standard of essay writing was not high in general. The practice of productive writing should be encouraged from first year onwards so that candidates gain confidence in their ability to express their own ideas without having to resort to the rote learning of vocabulary, phrases and sentences, many of which they clearly do not understand. In the written production tasks in the examination, candidates should be made aware that they should write about the title given, giving their **own personal opinion** in simple, clear, accurate Spanish.

Reading comprehension questions were mostly accessible, and most candidates were familiar with the type of tasks which the examination posed. Some candidates were well practised at working with synonyms while other candidates could have benefitted from more work on substituting words and phrases - with an emphasis on the meaning in context.

It was evident this year that a number of candidates opted to take the Higher Level paper when they should have opted for the Ordinary Level paper.

ORDINARY LEVEL

This year the overall performance of candidates was good and the majority of candidates attempted all sections of the examinations, with very few candidates leaving blank spaces. Only a small minority of weak candidates left the written expression section blank. The percentage of candidates achieving A+B+C was 74.5% and the percentage of candidates who failed to achieve a D grade in the examination dropped this year by 1% to 5.9%, which is a positive trend.

The aural section was, in general, well answered with most candidates achieving good marks. A number of candidates lost marks by not giving sufficient detail. Candidates are advised to read the questions carefully and to give the detail required.

The reading comprehension section of the paper was accessible to the majority of candidates, with many answering well. It was noted by examiners that Question 1 in Section A, *Pesadilla en el Paraíso*, required more manipulation of language than usual and proved demanding for many candidates. Question 5, *Una expresión de libertad*, provided an interesting

comprehension passage, with a wide range of vocabulary for candidates at this level and most candidates did well in this section.

In the written production section, most candidates attempted the Letter and the Note. As at Higher Level, examiners advise that candidates need to fully revise Junior Certificate vocabulary such as numbers, colours, clothes, adjectives, weather, parts of the body and animals.

5. Recommendations to Teachers and Students

The following advice is offered to teachers and students preparing for Leaving Certificate Spanish. The comments below refer to **both** levels unless otherwise specified. The depth of understanding and level of mastery required of candidates at Ordinary Level is obviously less than that expected at Higher Level.

5.1 Preparing for the Examination

Recommendations for Students and Teachers.

Preparation for the Oral Examination:

- Students should prepare **all** of the role plays.
- The target language should be used as much as possible in everyday classroom interactions.
- Students should practise using different tenses of verbs, thus enabling them to be confident when speaking about the past, future etc.
- Students are advised to prepare a wide range of topics in advance but not to approach the oral exam in a rote learning fashion
- If possible, students should create links with native Spanish students, whether by way of an exchange, school tour or family holiday, to facilitate authentic conversation and fluency in the language.

Preparation for the Written Examination:

Many of the points below are good practice that should be developed over the course of the students' five or six years of study of Spanish. Students will be successful at checking over work effectively on the day of the examination if these skills and habits have been developed over a period of time in the classroom.

- Students are encouraged to expand their reading in the target language.
- Students need to fully revise basic vocabulary and topics from the Junior Certificate syllabus such as numbers, colours, clothes, adjectives, weather, parts of the body and animals etc.
- Teachers should ensure that students constantly revise basic regular and irregular verbs such as *ir, ser, estar, gustar* and *encantar*.
- Accuracy in written expression needs to be improved, particularly in relation to verb endings, agreement of adjectives etc.
- Students taking the Higher Level should be encouraged to study the literary text.
- Knowledge of past examination papers should ensure that students are familiar with all aspects of the paper and know what is required in the different sections.
- More attention needs to be paid to students' writing skills. Students should be encouraged to have confidence to write about their own opinions and ideas in Spanish. They should be encouraged to produce simple written exercises in the target language from first year onwards. In this way, when students are required to engage with essay writing in senior cycle, they will have had ample practice at formulating ideas and expressing themselves in the target language.
- As numerical information features every year in the aural examination, such as temperature in weather forecasting, and numerical information also features regularly on both the Higher and Ordinary level examinations, candidates should ensure that they are familiar with recognising numerals.
- Cultural knowledge of fiestas and places of interest to visit, both in Spain and in the wider Hispanic world, would benefit students. Over the past decade there has been a steady increase in the number of topics pertaining to the Hispanic world on both Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations.

- From the quality of answering in both the aural and the written sections of the examination, there was evidence that candidates need to learn expressions of emotion, in line with the assessment objectives of the syllabus '*candidates will be assessed on their ability to express ideas, opinions and feelings*'.
- Constant reinforcement of question words in everyday classroom interactions would be of benefit.
- Students should practice exchanging synonyms and substituting words and phrases within a theme.
- Close to the time of examination, questions from past papers provided by the State Examinations Commission and from past aural examinations should provide useful practice. However, examination papers should not be relied on excessively as this would restrict the range of student learning.

5.2 During the Examination

Oral Examination - students are advised to:

- Get comfortable, take time initially and not rush to get everything said in the first few minutes - the General Conversation is ten minutes long so there is ample opportunity and time to express yourself.
- Try and have a natural flow of conversation, listen carefully to the question being asked and the tense in which it is asked.
- Not to worry about any mistakes made, instead concentrate on showing how much you know.

Aural Examination - students are advised to:

- Not to use pencil or corrector fluid or otherwise make the work illegible – if there is valid work presented and still visible it may be awarded marks, as in some circumstances marks can be awarded for crossed-out answers.
- Attempt every question and not leave blank spaces.
- Read all questions carefully and give the correct amount of detail required.

Written Paper:

HIGHER LEVEL

- When producing written work, students should express their own ideas in authentic language and refrain from using too many learned-off phrases and students should try to include personal examples.
- Students should read each question carefully, paying particular attention to key words
- Students should answer the exact question asked - as frequently many fail to do this.
- Students should write the title of the 'Link' question, Section B Question 5, at the top of the essay.
- In productive writing tasks, students should avoid the overuse of idiomatic rote-learned phrases, as sometimes they don't make sense in certain contexts.
- Students are advised to keep points in the Diary and the Note concise in order to avoid the unnecessary loss of marks.
- In the Higher Level paper, Section A, Journalistic Text, Q.4, students should endeavour to change all the words, as marks are deducted for repetition of the words in the question.
- When asked to give 'the meaning in context' in the comprehension passages, it is imperative to return to the text to find the meaning of the phrase in context and not just translate the phrase word for word.
- With synonym questions, when asked *Escribe en español las frases/palabras del texto que tengan el mismo sentido que las siguientes*, students should only quote the relevant phrase or words, as marks are lost for just quoting directly from the text.
- Students should not attempt to answer the Prescribed Literature question unless they have read the novel.
- Students should use all of the time allocated to the examination. If students finish early, they should review their work, checking as many answers as possible.

ORDINARY AND HIGHER LEVELS

- Students are advised to provide more detail in some of their answers and pay particular attention to questions which ask for full details.

- Students should attempt all questions in the examination and not leave any blank spaces.
- It is important that students read all the instructions carefully, so that they will not lose marks in some sections by answering in the wrong language.
- Students should not write in pencil, as it can be very difficult to read. Students are advised to use a black or blue biro or pen.
- Students are advised to leave some time at the end of the examination to review the written production sections, to check for adjectival endings, verb endings, gender of nouns etc.
- Students should be encouraged to take the Higher Level paper, if possible. However, some students, for whom the Higher Level paper is over challenging, should be encouraged to sit the examination at Ordinary Level.